

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 279 188

FL 016 496

AUTHOR Nyyssonen, Heikki
TITLE Discourse Analysis in English Studies.
PUB DATE 84
NOTE 9p.; In: Ringbom, Hakan, Ed.; Rissanen, Matti, Ed. Proceedings from the Nordic Conference for English Studies (2nd, Hanasaari/Hanaholmen, Finland, May 19-21, 1983); see FL 016 498.
PUB TYPE Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Communication Skills; Comparative Analysis; Correlation; *Discourse Analysis; *English; Expressive Language; Integrated Activities; Interaction; Interdisciplinary Approach; *Language Research; *Oral Language; Pragmatics; *Research Methodology; Speech Acts; Structural Analysis (Linguistics); *Written Language

ABSTRACT

Discourse is basically interactive. This is clear in conversation, but the concept can be extended to written language. Written text can be analyzed as spoken discourse. The methodology of English text studies has adhered too much to a textual approach and even extended it to spoken data. Another approach would be to begin with the spoken form of discourse, interpreting spoken discourse as such first and extending that approach to written text. (MSE)

 * Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
 * from the original document. *

ED279188

Heikki Nyyssönen
The English Department
University of Oulu

DISCOURSE ANALYSIS IN ENGLISH STUDIES

- 317 -

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION
CENTER (ERIC)

- ☒ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
- ☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
- Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS
MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

N. Enkvist

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES
INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

I would like to make it clear at the outset that I think of discourse analysis as a kind of umbrella term, denoting a wide range of activities. I don't want to restrict the term 'discourse analysis' so that it would be synonymous with conversational analysis. Actually I will be talking very little about conversation, although I am not thereby implying anything about the importance or unimportance of conversational analysis. I think it is useful to regard conversational analysis as a kind of prototype, because conversation is interaction par excellence and it reminds us that all discourse is basically interactivity.

However, if discourse analysis is to be a useful cover term for a wide range of activities, it must be shown that those activities, in spite of their wide coverage, have something basic in common. What we need is a definition. To quote the title of another paper, "Discourse Analysis - What's That?" (Hatch and Long, 1980).

It is easy to think of half a dozen definitions, but I won't bore you with those. Instead let me give you now two features which may be called the defining features of discourse and, by the same token, of discourse analysis as well.

They are the following: first, discourse is +supra-sentential and, secondly, discourse is +use. In other words, discourse refers to a supra-sentential structure which is put to communicative use (cf. Edmondson, 1981: 4).

I am not very happy with this definition, because I am not very happy with the term 'supra-sentential'. However, the term 'supra-sentential' has its historical background. In the work of Zellig Harris, in the 1950's, discourse analysis was an extension of the analysis of the sentence. The term 'discourse analysis' was revived later, in the 1960's and 70's, by sociolinguists, and in particular by people like Hymes and Labov, but then it was employed in a different meaning. Hymes did not talk about discourse ana-

BEST COPY AVAILABLE 2

FL016496

lysis as an extension of grammar but as a linguistics of a new kind.

In the work of Hymes this new linguistics became the ethnography of speaking. Here the unit of analysis was the speech act. These combined to form speech events, and Hymes developed a model for the analysis of speech events, a model that was basically a refinement of one proposed originally, although for a different purpose, by Roman Jakobson (Hymes, 1972 ; Jakobson, 1960).

This sociolinguistic study of speech events coincided, temporally, with the philosophical analysis of illocutionary acts, by Austin and Searle and others. Searle, in particular, had considerable influence on linguistics where his work stimulated a fresh interest in contextual semantics - which some people even had the nerve of calling pragmatics. Previously, pragmatics had been a kind of waste-basket term. In the work of Charles Morris, however, pragmatics had gained some measure of respectability, and later, in the writings of Montague in particular, pragmatics was shown to be capable of formalisation - which of course made it fully respectable (cf. Montague, 1974).

So in the 1960's and 70's the domain of what was beginning to be called discourse analysis was being approached from at least three different directions: sociolinguistics, the philosophy of language and linguistic pragmatics. In this situation there now arose attempts to make a distinction, in theory if not in practice, between text and discourse. It was noted by Henry Widdowson that the term 'discourse' itself is used in two different ways (Widdowson, 1979: 23). There are those - let's call them linguists - who use it to mean a sequence of sentences (in the tradition, in fact, originated by Harris). Then there are those - let's call them sociolinguists (or applied linguists) - who use the term 'discourse' in a different way, to mean the connections between language and social action: in discourse, they say, language is put to use for the performance of social actions. Labov had already proposed some rules of discourse and those made reference to a number of social constructs such as the knowledge shared by participants, their rights and duties and so on (Labov, 1971). This made Widdowson draw another distinction, between 'use' and 'usage' (Widdowson, 1979: 143). Usage is describable by rules of grammar while use is only describable by rules of discourse. This difference is roughly the same as between grammaticality and acceptability: texts that are fully grammatical - that is, generated by rules of usage - are not necessarily fully acceptable - well-formed according to rules of use.

Is it surprising, then, if discourse analysis can denote a wide range of

activities, considering that its origins are so varied? I have not even had time to discuss all the influences, such as ethnomethodology and the work on text grammars and text linguistics. In the text linguistics of de Beaugrande and Dressler (1981), for instance, there are a number of points of contact with discourse analysis, and it may be noted that the emphasis in text linguistics, which used to be on the formal properties of text, has gradually been shifting towards those mental operations which underlie text production and interpretation. This modelling of text-users' mental processes now has a fresh theoretical basis in artificial intelligence and cognitive psychology.

Nevertheless, in spite of this variety there is something basic that is common to these activities, namely the concern with supra-sentential structure and communicative function. The emphasis on function has given rise to a linguistics of a new kind which is characterised, essentially, by an inter-disciplinary approach. In this inter-disciplinary approach there is a concern with text types and text forms and with modes of discourse such as monologue and dialogue, planned and unplanned. There is a concern with conventions specific to a given genre, involving things like focus, overall plan and coherence and things like audience, signalling devices and the level of language. There is always the question of point of view. There are questions concerning style. There are questions concerning cohesion - how do the units of a text cohere? What is the type of cohesion characteristic of a text or a text type? What things in a text make it effective as communication? Some of these questions are relevant to the analysis of discourse, others are pertinent to the study of text. We have already noted that these terms, text and discourse, need not be synonymous. Widdowson (1979: 90), for instance, has defined text as 'sentences in combination' and discourse as 'the use of sentences'. Willis Edmondson (1981) makes a distinction between two different approaches to supra-sentential structure. In the one it is seen as a structured sequence of linguistic expressions, forming a unitary whole - this is the textual approach. In the other, it is seen as a structured event, manifest in linguistic (and other) behaviour - this is the discursal approach. They are just two different approaches and there is no absolute opposition between them.

I think that this is a common-sensical attitude. Discourse is like the deep structure which underlies the surface text, and the notion that best describes the underlying discourse structure is coherence, while the concept that best defines the surface text is cohesion. Cohesion means the ways in which the elements of a text are mutually connected. Coherence is something

that must be constructed by inference. A supra-sentential structure is cohesive as text and coherent as discourse.

However, it must also conform to the conventions of a specific genre, whether a fairy tale or a sermon, a piece of poetry or a short story (or a television soap-opera). Or take the academic lecture, a piece of discourse that is non-spontaneous and planned, written to be spoken - occasionally, written to be spoken as if not written. How should we go about finding the framework of a lecture? A few guidelines may be suggested (cf. Coulthard and Montgomery, 1981). First look for those devices by which the main information is communicated, then find the ways in which the subsidiary content is conveyed. Observe the ways in which topics are introduced. Notice how the connections among the propositions are signalled.

Next see whether you can determine the overall plan of the lecture. Any composition, we know, should have a beginning, a middle and an end. This is an informal notion of the hierarchical structure of a discourse. Narratives have an opening, a setting and a story line. Even a casual conversation is divided into the main discourse units, those into smaller units and so on. Thus a conversation has a preparatory phase, a 'business' phase and a leave-taking phase. The same with a lecture. Within this basic framework, however, we must allow for individual variation. But some things must remain constant, lest the purpose and the focus be lost and forgotten. To make sure that they are not forgotten a lecturer will impose a subsidiary organisation on the main one. This consists of devices that contextualise, explain and clarify, point out and emphasise, comment and evaluate.

The main purpose of a lecture is to give information but like other speech acts lectures are multi-functional. They contain elements which are persuasive and elements which are esthetic. There will then, apart from the strictly literal elements, be also non-literal elements, such as overstatements and understatements, metaphors and epigrams and so on. As we know, such elements, used for a rhetorical and esthetic effect, are found even outside the kind of discourse we normally call 'art'. They are found in journalistic style, in advertisements, sports commentary, even political speeches. Here we are dealing with intentions that either complement the communicative intention or substitute for it - these intentions may be called 'collateral' (Bach and Harnish, 1979). In collateral acts we find non-literality used for the purpose of kidding or joking, punning or story-telling, deliberate ambiguity and so on. In general, we perhaps think of discourse too much as communication and too little as expression. Yet it is the expressive which holds the most appeal to the esthetic sense,

as well as the intellectual curiosity. In this area, a useful distinction has recently been proposed by Widdowson, between 'reference', or the communicative, and 'representation', or the expressive (Widdowson, forthcoming). A fictional story, for instance, is not meant to communicate any attitude on the part of the speaker - it is not meant as referential. Therefore we shouldn't expect it to be governed by the conventions of referential discourse. We don't expect the Gricean maxims, with their emphasis on communicative efficiency, to be upheld in the kind of representational discourse which puts a premium on rhetorical effect. For the sake of effect, efficiency gets sacrificed. For the sake of impression, truth is suppressed. For the sake of novelty, convention gets thrown overboard. This may mean taking a familiar pattern and giving it a new twist. Here the principle is that of intertextuality. Intertextuality depends on the fact that one text will suggest another. Thus the text "To be taken daily before caviare", found in the advertisement of an alcoholic beverage, suggests another, found in medical prescriptions. In the prescription the text, "To be taken daily before meals". is a communicative act, based on reference. In the advertisement the text, "To be taken daily before caviare", is a collateral act, based on representation. In the case of the advertisement we are not supposed to take in its logical meaning: we are supposed to dwell on its associations. Thus the ad is for those who are not just thirsty for a drink but hungry for a status symbol.

So there are expressive, or as we have said, collateral, elements to be found also in the kind of discourse we don't normally call 'art'. But then the word 'art' itself is used in extended ways and why shouldn't we be able to talk of the art of advertising, for instance? In discourse analysis there is interesting work done, for instance, on the art of narration. This has shown that the patterns we find in narratives are functionally motivated. This applies to grammatical patterns, like tenses and modals, and rhetorical patterns, like point of view, parallelism and ordering. The use of these patterns can be related to specific functions. In a written story this will affect not only the language but the graphology and typology as well. In oral delivery it will affect the intonation and paralanguage. Intonation is enlisted in the service of expressive emphasis but it is used in other ways as well - for instance, to distinguish the familiar from the novel, the expected from the unexpected (Brazil, Coulthard and Jones, 1981: 15-16).

Intonation is just one of the characteristics of spoken discourse as opposed to writing. It is one of the virtues of discourse analysis that it

draws attention to those features of speech which are otherwise dismissed as redundant or disturbing. What may be disturbing or redundant in writing may be perfectly functional in speaking. Even in fluent speech there are all sorts of fillers, shifts and repetitions that would be disturbing in writing but which have a functional or strategic purpose in speaking - giving feedback or serving to gain time, acting as hedges or politeness markers. The results of this research are already revising our opinions about the nature of fluency.

I would like to suggest to you, now, that all this work on text and discourse is not irrelevant to English studies. English studies is about English texts - traditionally, texts that are written, written to be read or at least written not necessarily to be spoken. There is a lot still that needs to be found out about such texts. What I am suggesting, however, is that this could be done also by looking at their discourse features, their interactive structure and the functions of their constituent parts. Structure is not independent of function, and frequently structure may seem impossible or unacceptable if it is considered in the abstract, irrespective of context and function. This abstraction is of course normal in autonomous syntax, which relies on introspection, and the grammarian's sentences often strike us as bizarre. They are fictions, but fact may be stranger than fiction. A sentence like 'I pick up trains when you were younger', taken out of context, seems impossible. However, put it in the mouth of a clairvoyant, 'retrodicting' the past life of a client over the Tarot cards, and you will see that the sentence 'I pick up trains when you were younger' not only has a meaning but a function and use as well.

In this way pragmatics (or 'contextualisation') and discourse analysis may help us to revise our notions of communicative competence, of what is possible and feasible in a language and what in fact is done. Communicative competence contains, essentially, a pragmatic component. In the words of Hymes (1972), without the rules of use, the rules of grammar are useless. On the pragmatic level there is scope for the integration of these rules. It means the integration of use and usage, reference and representation. On this level, there is also scope for the reinforcement of linguistic intuition, that 'feeling for language' Belyayev was so fond of stressing, though incapable of defining (Belyayev, 1963). Contextual analysis of empirical data is crucially based on intuitions, but those intuitions can only be accounted for by means of theoretical concepts. Thus contextual analysis is a method of combining communicative competence, which is based on intuition, and theoretical understanding, which is based on the

formalisation of the intuition.

Perhaps I can illustrate this very briefly by means of the following text:

You remind me of my uncle's brother. He was always on the move, that man. Never without a passport. Had an eye for the girls. Very much your build. Bit of an athlete. Long-jump specialist. Had a penchant for nuts. That's what it was. Nothing else but a penchant. Couldn't eat enough of them. Peanuts, walnuts, Brazil nuts, wouldn't touch a piece of fruit cake. Had a marvellous stop-watch. Picked it up in Hong Kong. (...) ¹

We can see that the formal structure of this extract is that of referential discourse: There are the staccato rhythms and cohesive patterns of everyday speech, of the rambling, 'thinking aloud' variety. It is, however, really a speech from a play and so representational. There's clearly a collateral intention here, namely to parody the kind of everyday language that it resembles. I have underlined a passage to illustrate this collateral intention. In this passage the parody seems to depend on the use of the word penchant. This fine, foreign word is put in the mouth of a cockney who uses it incorrectly. Obviously a word stronger than penchant would be appropriate. There are also other inconsequential features in the extract, and they all act as indicators of the collateral intention of a parody.

In order to bring this talk to an end, let me go back to the beginning. There it was suggested that discourse is basically interactivity. This is easily seen in the case of conversation but it applies to all other types of discourse as well. What is reading, someone has said, but silent conversation? Like Benison Gray, we could analyse written text as spoken discourse, as a kind of 'implied dialogue' (Gray, 1977). In English studies we have perhaps grown too accustomed to looking at text merely as text and to extending this textual approach even to spoken data. What is proposed here is a different procedure which is to interpret spoken discourse as spoken discourse and to extend such an approach even to written text. Here philology is not very helpful, and linguistics may only be able to provide a few hints. Besides, in the words of Widdowson (1973), the applied linguist cannot always wait for the linguist to provide him with something to apply. Discourse analysis, I would like to suggest, is a case in point.

¹ Harold Pinter, The Caretaker. (Act II)

REFERENCES

- Bach, Kent and Robert M. Harnish. 1979. *Linguistic Communication and Speech Acts*. Cambridge, Mass.: The M.I.T. Press.
- de Beaugrande, Robert and Wolfgang Dressler. 1981. *Introduction to Text Linguistics*. London and New York: Longman.
- Belyayev, B.V. 1963. *The Psychology of Teaching Foreign Languages*. Oxford: Pergamon Press.
- Brazil, David, Malcolm Coulthard and Catherine Jones. 1981. *Discourse Intonation and Language Teaching*. London: Longman.
- Coulthard, Malcolm and Martin Montgomery. 1981. "The structure of monologue". *Studies in Discourse Analysis*. Ed. Malcolm Coulthard and Martin Montgomery. 1981. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul. (31-59)
- Edmondson, Willis. 1981. *Spoken Discourse: A Model for Analysis*. London: Longman.
- Gray, Benison. 1977. *The Grammatical Foundations of Rhetoric*. The Hague: Mouton.
- Hatch, Evelyn and Michael H. Long. 1980. *Discourse analysis - what's that?* *Discourse Analysis in Second Language Research*. 1980. Ed. Diane Larsen-Freeman. Rowley, Mass.: Newbury House. (1-40)
- Hymes, Dell. 1972. "Models of the interaction of language and social life". *Directions in Sociolinguistics: The Ethnography of Communication*. Ed. John J. Gumperz and Dell Hymes. 1972. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston. (35-71)
- Jakobson, Roman. 1960. "Concluding statement: linguistics and poetics". *Style in Language*. Ed. Thomas A. Sebeok. 1960. Cambridge, Mass.: The M.I.T. Press. (350-377)
- Labov, William. 1971. "The study of language in its social context". *Advances in the Sociology of Language*, volume 1. Ed. Joshua Fishman. 1971. The Hague: Mouton. (152-216)
- Montague, R. 1974. *Formal Philosophy: Selected Papers*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Widdowson, H.G. 1973. "Directions in the teaching of discourse". *Theoretical Models in Applied Linguistics*. Ed. S. Pit Corder and E. Roulet. 1973. Brussels: Aimav. Paris: Didier. (65-76)
- Widdowson, H.G. 1979. *Explorations in Applied Linguistics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Widdowson, H.G. (forthcoming). "Reference and representation as modes of meaning". *AFinLA Yearbook 1983*. Ed. Heikki Nyyssönen and Anna Mauranen. Publications of the Finnish Association of Applied Linguistics.